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Update at 1:52 p.m. Saturday from staff writer Bruce Tomaso: [Catholic bishop will celebrate Mass in West](#) -- Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of the Catholic Diocese of Austin will preside at a Mass at 10:30 a.m. Sunday in St. Mary's Church of the Assumption in West.

Update at 12:07 a.m. Saturday from staff writer Sarah Mervosh: Even some of the residents whose homes still stand have been hit hard by the explosion's aftermath.

Gary Ellis, 57, lives about a half a mile from the plant and said the windows in his

house were blown out in the blast. He has been able to stay at home, but has been without running water since Wednesday night.

He stopped by the donation center Saturday to pick up canned food and clothes until he can go to Waco and find a laundry mat.

"It's like luxury camping," he said. "That's tough to say right now, but we have electricity."

Wearing a dirty white T-shirt under a button up jean shirt, Ellis searched for clean clothes and draped a pair of jeans and several T-shirts over his arm.

"It means an awful lot to me," he said of the donations. "An awful lot."

As he was browsing, he pointed out a forklift as it drove past. He recognized it as the one from his recycling business that he had donated for use.

Like so many others in the town, Ellis had given what he could to help -- even though he has so little right now.

Nearly 300 volunteers had signed in at the donation site by 11 a.m. Saturday. An estimated 1,000 to 1,500 had turned out the day before.

They sorted and organized an overwhelming number of donations that ranged from the necessary to the comforting.

Some boxes were filled high with powder blue lady's deodorant sticks and miniature shampoo bottles. In one, the black cords of cell phone chargers tangled together. Misfit items like a small elephant statue and a reindeer decoration made of faux-pine could be found as well.

Rachel Garica, 25, said she lives about three blocks from the plant and evacuated without any belongings. She hoped to pick up clothes for herself, her husband and three children.

"Not knowing how the house is, we can't really afford to spend money on clothes," she said.

Garica and other residents were waiting to hear Saturday when they could see their homes -- or what's left of them. She said authorities haven't allowed her to return, not even for her son's medication.

"When we left, we left," she said. "They haven't let us back in."

Even for Ellis, who has been able to stay at home, there are unknowns. He has heard it could take up to six months for water to turn back on.

"We're going to be displaced for a long time," he said. "It's not going to be the same town we lived in."

As Garica walked past the baby toys and carriers, her 7-year-old son, Carlito, tagged along next to her wearing a Scooby-Doo shirt.

When a lab-mix named Squidgy walked by, the boy reached out to pet her. Garica pulled him back, warning him to ask before he touches.

But it was okay. Squidgy was a therapy dog, one of several there to comfort victims. Her owner asked if he wanted to see the dog do a trick. Carlito held out his hand and Squidgy gave paw.

Carlito giggled, revealing a gap-tooth smile. And after a long, arduous week, his mother smiled too.

Update at 11:41 a.m. Saturday from staff writer Claire Cardona: Joyce Norse is pretty sure her home is gone.

She was about half a mile away when the plant exploded and doesn't have a scratch on her, but she heard a boom like what she said an atomic bomb blast must sound like.

"There was this dark grey cloud -- it was daytime -- but it got like night," Norse said.

Norse lives on Jane Lane, about three blocks from where the fertilizer plant once stood. She's heard that all the houses on Jane Lane, and Davis and Reagan streets have been totally destroyed.

Residents who have been left homeless since evacuating from their homes Wednesday night are filtering into St. Josephs Hall to sign up to be let back into their neighborhoods.

Some residents have heard that they will be escorted in and back out by officials, but many seem uncertain of the process.

Without an ID, her rings or her purse, Norse has just been waiting for permission to return to her home. She said she's heard it could be a few days, but hopefully by Saturday afternoon.

Until then, Norse is in limbo. She is staying with her daughter Susan Mercer and wearing Mercer's clothes.

Everyone has been accommodating and helpful, she said, but Norse wants to see the

damage so she can begin the rebuilding and healing process.

"I don't want to lose my home, but I'm OK," she said. "I'm OK, so houses can be replaced and things in the houses can be replaced."

Update at 11:36 a.m. Saturday from staff writer Brandon Formby: Pete and Jacki Arias are tired of waiting.

The West couple spent Saturday morning registering their names, address, phone numbers and family information with officials who said a phone call would let them know when they could return to their house near the blast site.

The couple said they were given no timeframe as to when to expect such information.

"We need to get some straight answers," Pete Arias said.

The couple have been traveling back and forth from Waco each day to keep apprised of information. It's starting to take its toll.

"Don't leave us hanging," Pete Arias said.

He said he didn't know what agency took his information but assumed it was the city.

Mayor Pro Tem Steve Vanek told a crowd of reporters who descended on City Hall for what they believed would be a 10 a.m. press conference that officials are writing a statement and hope to have it finished by noon.

Vanek declined to answer any questions until the ATF says he can. He also said his main concern was keeping his residents informed.

Pete Arias said he's not satisfied with city efforts to do so on this, the third day after the blast.

"The area's not that big," he said.

Original story:

WEST — The fertilizer plant that exploded Wednesday had at least 540,000 pounds of potentially dangerous ammonium nitrate in a storage building, a 2012 company filing with the state health department shows.

That's more than 100 times the weight of the ammonium nitrate and fuel oil mix that Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh used to destroy the Murrah Federal Building 18 years ago Friday.

The size of the explosive fertilizer stockpile on the property of West Fertilizer Co. and Adair Grain became clear Friday as an army of federal, state and local investigators picked through acres of shredded metal and the debris from blasted homes and schools close to the site.

The number of deaths rose to 14 with the discovery of two more bodies Friday. More than 200 people were injured.

The revelation that West Fertilizer had 270 tons of ammonium nitrate in storage on its property is certain to be a key element of the investigations ahead.

Besides being a fertilizer, ammonium nitrate is used worldwide as the main ingredient in explosives for mining, road-building and other uses. Federal and state agencies carefully track its sales to keep it from falling into terrorist or criminal hands.

Investigators have not said what might have caused the fire and explosion. It was unclear who knew the ammonium nitrate was stored at the facility.

Experts with the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and other agencies have convened in the town 80 miles south of Dallas for what promises to be a long and detailed process of determining exactly what happened.

The explosion, just before 8 p.m. Wednesday, came as members of the local volunteer fire department tried to extinguish a small fire at the fertilizer company. The blast, felt as far away as Arlington, destroyed a nearby intermediate school and homes across a four-block area and heavily damaged an apartment complex, a nursing home and two other school buildings.

Search and rescue teams slowly worked their way through the fragile buildings on Thursday and most of Friday before Gov. Rick Perry announced that their work was finished.

But local residents, desperate to see what they could salvage from their homes, were still being kept away from the hardest-hit area. That frustration, coupled with an explosion most people hadn't realized could happen, bubbled over on Friday.

"If I were a reporter and could ask one question to the mayor, and to Perry, and to all those people at the podium, it would be this: Do you have a siren in town that could alert us to a problem at the plant, instead of letting it be on fire and none of us know that an explosion could happen?" said Mandy Williams, who fled from her home barefoot, with her 3-year-old son, her grandmother and little else.

Williams was still waiting to be let back inside. She and her neighbors were told that wouldn't happen Friday because the houses are unstable. Some might be allowed in for a limited time, block by block, on Saturday if they have proper identification.

"What about people who left their IDs inside?" she wondered.

Williams had lived in the house on Davis Street since she was 3, growing up around the plant but never realizing it posed any danger. Now, she's being told she can't go home — at least not to stay.

"It's surreal," she said.

Some residents were so frustrated at being kept from their homes that they gave their addresses to state Rep. Kyle Kacal, who represents West, and asked him to check on their houses when he and other officials toured the neighborhoods closest to the fertilizer plant.

U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz visited West on Friday, touring the blast site and later talking with reporters about the steps to come.

Cruz stressed the need "for a careful investigation."

"All of us want to know what happened here, what caused it and what factors made it more likely," he said. But "it would be a mistake to rush to a conclusion before the facts and evidence are assembled."

Many in town questioned why officials allowed homes, schools and a nursing home to be built so close to the fertilizer company.

Cornyn said that proximity stems from the nature of West.

"This is a small agriculture community," he said. "Everything is close to everything else. But some very important questions need to be asked coming out of this."

Perry said he expects a discussion concerning the safety of locating homes and schools so close to dangerous industries.

"Whatever the manufacturing might be, whether it's a fertilizer plant, refinery, it's a legitimate question," he said.

When the fertilizer plant was built in 1962, local residents said, it was about a mile north of the rest of town.

West Rest Haven, the nursing home seriously damaged in the explosion, opened in 1966, according to Bettye Tucker.

"At the time, nobody in town was concerned," she said.

With her husband, Jake, Tucker has owned and managed apartments, duplexes and single-family homes built within a couple of blocks of the plant — including the couple's own four-bedroom home, completed in 1969, she said.

Donald Adair, the owner of Adair Grain and West Fertilizer Co., was not available to answer questions but issued a written statement Friday saying his company was committed to working closely with agencies investigating the fire and explosion.

"We are presenting all employees for interviews and will assist in the fact-finding to whatever degree possible," the statement said. "We pledge to do everything we can to understand what happened to ensure nothing like this ever happens again in any community."

Adair, a lifelong resident of the town of 2,800, called this "a terrible week for everyone in West" and said "I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt sympathy for those affected and my appreciation for those who responded."

"My heart is broken with grief for the tragic losses to so many families in our community," he said in the statement.

No employees were inside the plant at the time of the explosion.

"It was the end of the day," said Daniel Keeney, a spokesman for Adair Grain.

The only employee who died was one who had returned to the site as a volunteer firefighter. Keeney didn't identify the employee.

Early speculation on the cause of the explosion focused on the fire reaching the pressurized tanks of anhydrous ammonia, a liquid fertilizer, but experts quickly discounted the likelihood of an enormous blast from that relatively nonexplosive chemical.

They suggested that ammonium nitrate might be the cause. In the days since the explosion, evidence for the presence of a large amount of ammonium nitrate mounted, culminating in the release of the company's disclosure to the health department.

The Texas Department of Public Safety has treated the site as a crime scene as a precaution, but officials in West haven't said whether they believe the explosion was a crime or an accident.

The ammonium nitrate has quickly become a likely focus of the investigation. It is not known how the company was handling or securing the material.

Bryan W. Shaw, chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, said

Friday that no cause for the explosion was known. Shaw, who has a doctorate in agricultural engineering and has been an agricultural safety official, said an anhydrous ammonia explosion would be nearly a first.

“The key thing that I would say is we’ve not seen this type of a tragedy occur with this type of facility in the scenario they’re looking at here,” he said.

Differing views on the security sensitivity of ammonium nitrate vs. disclosures of neighborhood hazards were on display Friday. While the state health department was releasing mandatory chemical disclosures that companies submit to it, the state’s fertilizer regulator, the Office of the Texas State Chemist, tried to block disclosure of its own similar records.

The chemist’s office, part of Texas A&M University, asked the Texas attorney general’s office to rule on whether it must release fertilizer inventories to *The Dallas Morning News* in light of the West explosion. The chemist’s office said such information might help those wishing to build a bomb.

Public access to many records dealing with potential hazards has been restricted since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, although some limits have been relaxed to help communities respond to dangers in their neighborhoods.

Staff writers Robert T. Garrett, Claire Cardona, Brandon Formby, Karen Brooks Harper, Christina Rosales and Matt Jacob contributed to this report. Formby reported from West, and Loftis and Young from Dallas.